



**REPORT ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN BLOOMINGTON AND MONROE  
COUNTY  
CITY OF BLOOMINGTON COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

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Report on the Status of Women in Bloomington and Monroe County  
Commission on the Status of Women  
City of Bloomington Community and Family Resources Department

# CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP/POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

## INTRODUCTION

Women comprise approximately 51% of the population. However, women held 90 (17%) of the 535 seats in the 111<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress, –17 (17%) of the 100 seats in the Senate, and 74, (17%) of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives. Per the Inter-Parliamentary Union, this places the United States 72<sup>nd</sup> worldwide<sup>1</sup> in terms of the number of women serving in the national legislature which, according to Amy Caiazza of Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR), places “the United States near the bottom of Western industrialized democracies” (IWPR Publication #1910, 2002). These large gender disparities are also evident in political leadership at the state and local levels in 2010: six states have women governors, and among the 100 largest cities in the United States, seven have female mayors (National Women’s Political Caucus).

If women want to affect change in their lives and those of others within the community, state, country and world, they must be actively engaged. This is particularly important in the civic arena, which shapes the policy of our daily lives. This engagement can take varying forms, from sitting on a local council, board or commission, to running for political office from county commissioner to United States President.

One of the primary ways to encourage the political engagement of women is to examine women’s civic involvement at a local level. By fostering women’s political participation at a local level, we can begin to affect change at all levels. To this end, this report reviews:

Why it is important for women to be civically engaged and how this representation or lack thereof impacts the lives of women;

The number of elected officials who are female in the Bloomington community and in Monroe County;

The number of women who are appointed to political positions in the Bloomington community and Monroe County; and

Female representation on Bloomington commissions.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this report offers strategies and policies to encourage women’s civic engagement.

<sup>1</sup> Note that Rwanda ranks 1<sup>st</sup> with 56% of the seats held by women. Also, interestingly, Afghanistan ranks 30<sup>th</sup> and Iraq ranks 39<sup>th</sup>.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

### *Why it Matters...*

Women's involvement in political life is important quite simply because political decisions and policies impact women directly. Even more, women have different concerns than men, and often place different values on the concerns they have in common with men. Political participation can range from voting, to addressing labels for a feminist candidate, to sitting on a local council or commission, to running for political office. Women's political participation is the only way to ensure that women's lives, opinions and ideas are represented. Also, women's political participation is important as democracy is strengthened through equal representation.

Additionally, regardless of party affiliation, female officeholders are more likely than males to support women's agendas (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 1991).

Amy Caiazza (2002) concluded that "on an aggregate level, women's presence in legislatures and other state-level elected offices is closely associated with better policy for women. This suggests that having women in elected office may be important to encouraging states to adopt policies relevant to women's lives. Conversely, women's resources and rights may influence the number of women elected to public office. These findings point to a continued need for targeted efforts to increase women's representation" (IWPR Publication #I910, *Does Women's Representation in Elected Office Lead to Women-Friendly Policy?* 2002). In addition, legislatures with larger proportions of female elected officials tend to address women's issues more often and more seriously than those with fewer representatives (Dodson, 1991; Thomas, 1994). Finally, representation through institutions such as women's commissions or women's legislative caucuses can both provide ongoing channels for the expression of women's concerns and make policymakers more accessible to women, especially when those institutions work closely with women's organizations (Stetson and Mazur, 1995).

For these reasons, it is clear that encouraging women to be politically engaged not only improves the lives of women, but also families, which leads to improved standards of living for the community.

"But I have to tell you, when I got to Washington, I found that some of the 'women's issues—the family issues'—weren't being addressed by the men in power. Things like child support enforcement and women's health issues and family safety issues. It wasn't that the men were opposed to these issues—they just didn't get it. They were not sufficiently aware of them. So I realized, in many important areas—if we women in government don't take action, no one else will." Congresswoman Marge Roukema (R-NJ), Congressional Record, April 13, 1999, from IWPR Publication #I906, October 2000

### ***Local Elected Officials***

Though research demonstrates that women's political participation is important, it also shows that it is lacking. This section of the report explores the political participation of women in Bloomington and Monroe County by examining the number of female candidates for various elections and how they fared in their races.

#### ***Women Serving in Elected Positions in Bloomington***

When examining the civic engagement of women in the Bloomington community, three data points were captured: the number of women candidates running for office from 1983-2007, the number of women who were elected during this same time period, and the number of women currently holding political office.

#### ***Bloomington Female Elected Officials – 1983 to 2007***

The number of women running for office peaked in 1991, and was on a downward trend since in both the percentage of women running for city elected positions, as well as the percentage winning. This trend was reversed in the 2007 election when the number of women running for elected position climbed to 38.

### Bloomington Female Elected Officials – 2010

In 2010, three women serve in elected positions in the City of Bloomington.

○

City Clerk – Regina Moore

○

Common Council – 2/9 – District V – Isabel Piedmont; At Large – Susan Sandberg

In 2008 Susan Sandberg served as president of the city council and in 2010 Isabel Piedmont served as president of the city council. It is important to note that during this time, Commissioners Piedmont and Sandberg co-sponsored the enabling legislation that expanded the Commission on the Status of Women.

### *Women Serving in Elected Positions in Monroe County*

When examining the civic engagement of women in Monroe County, three data points were captured: the number of women candidates running for office from 1984-2008, the number of women who were elected during this same time period, and the number of women currently holding political office.

### Monroe County Female Elected Officials – 1984 to 2008

Data over this 24-year period showed that female candidates for county elected office dropped sharply in 1990. However, the overall trend is a very gradual increase in the percentage of females running for county offices.

The percentage of women elected as county officials has been up and down over the years with a peak at 50 percent in both 2004 and 2008. Monroe County has nearly reached parity in its county representation!

Additionally, not represented in these graphs, twelve women served in elected positions in Monroe County in 2010.

Board of Commissioners – 1/3 – Iris Kiesling, District 3

County Council – 3/7 – Marty Hawk, District 3; Jill Lesh, District 4; Julie Thomas, At Large

Assessor – Judith Ann Sharp

Auditor – Amy Gerstman

Judge, Division 4 – Elizabeth A. Cure

Judge, Division 5 – Mary Ellen Diekhoff

Judge, Division 6 – Frances G. Hill

Judge, Division 8 – Valerie Haughton

Judge, Division 9 – Teresa D. Harper

Treasurer – Catherine Smith

#### *Women Elected Positions to the Monroe County School Board*

For this report, researchers tracked (1) the number of women ran for and (2) the number of women who were elected to the Monroe County School Board from 1984-2008. The names of female representatives from 2006 and 2008 are also provided.

#### *Monroe County School Board Female Representatives – 1984 to 2008*

The percentage of women running and winning school board positions has varied from year to year with an overall upward trend since the low point of zero in 1990. In both the 2000 and 2006 elections, 100% of the school board members elected were women!

#### Monroe County School Board Female Representatives – 2006

- District 1 – Valerie Merriam
- District 3 – Victoria Streiff
- District 7 – Jeannine Butler

#### Monroe County School Board Female Representatives – 2008

- District 2 – Sue Wanzer
- District 6 – Lois Sabo-Skelton

#### Women Appointed to Political Positions in Bloomington

On a local level, the following appointed positions are held by women:

Deputy Chief of Police - Janelle Benedict

Safe & Civil City Coordinator - Beverly Calender-Anderson

Laurie Ringquist – Director of Animal Control

Lisa Abbott - Housing and Neighborhood Development (HAND) Director

Margie Rice - Corporation Counsel

Maria Heslin - Deputy Mayor

Danise Alano - Economic Development and Sustainment

Miah Michaelson - Assistant Director for Economic Development

Susie Johnson - Public Works Director

Penny Howard Myers - Assistant. Director of Public Works

### City of Bloomington Commissions

When examining women's participation in local government, it is also key to look at the gender composition of city commissions. The City of Bloomington promotes citizen involvement by inviting residents to serve on a variety of boards, commissions, committees, and councils designed to assist the City in its information gathering and deliberative processes. Twenty six boards and commissions help advise city leaders on key policy issues that impact the quality of life in our community. Positions on these boards are either appointed by the Mayor or by the Common Council.

Involvement in boards and commissions is a vital way for women to express political leadership. Bloomington has both statutory boards, those created and regulated by Indiana state law, and non-statutory boards, which are simply commissioned by the city.

To better understand women's representation on these boards and commission, researchers reviewed the gender composition of each board and commission using data from 2009. The results show that while women's overall representation on boards and commissions is about at parity with men, it is important to note the disparity in female-to-male representation between statutory and non-statutory commissions in that women are represented in greater numbers on the non-statutory commissions. Specifically, women currently hold over 50% of the positions on non-statutory commissions, but only one-third of the positions on statutory commissions.

*Note: The numbers that follow the title of each commission represent # of women/# of total commissioners. Commissions are either Non-Statutory or Statutory. Statutory commissions are created and regulated by Indiana law. **Bold** text and \* denotes Statutory Commissions.*

Animal Control Commission – 5/6

Arts Commission – 4/9

Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety Commission – 4/7

Commission on the Status of Black Males – 1/5

Community and Family Resources Commission – 5/9

**\*Economic Development Commission – 1/5**

Environmental Commission – 8/12

Hispanic & Latino Affairs – 5/7

Historic Preservation Commission – 7/10

**\*Housing Authority – 4/7**

Housing Quality Appeals – 4/6

Human Rights Commission – 5/7

**\*Industrial Development Advisory Commission – 4/8**

Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Commission – 4/7

**\*Park Commission – 1/4**

**\*Plan Commission – 3/11**

**\*Public Safety Board – 1/5**

**\*Public Transportation Corp. Board – 2/5**

**\*Public Works Board – 1/3**

**\*Redevelopment Commission – 1/5**

Telecommunications Council – 1/5

Traffic Commission – 1/6

Tree Commission – 3/7

**\*Bloomington Urban Enterprise Association – 5/11**

**\*Utilities Service Board – 1/9**

**\*Zoning Appeals Board – 3/6**

In summary, while tremendous strides have been made regarding women's representation within Bloomington and Monroe County, more work remains. Suggestions regarding what the community can do follow.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING LOCAL WOMEN'S CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

According to Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, "Although women report higher voter turnout than men, fewer women participate in informal political activities directed at solving community problems, are affiliated with organizations that take political stances, or contact their elected officials about issues or policies" (*Six Strategies That Encourage Women's Political Activism: Lessons from Interfaith Community*

*Organizing*, IWPR, 1995). As noted in the introduction, this can have direct negative impact on the attention paid to women and family issues. Having women in office often leads to better policies for women, which can improve women's lives. This, in turn, has an overall positive effect on the well-being of a community. Therefore, it is important to identify ways to increase women's civic engagement.

One body of research suggests six strategies for increased civic engagement by women:

1.

Provide political role models of women who break the mold

Provide space for women to address their fears and embrace their anger

Build connections across lines of race and class

Gently push women into political leadership

Develop mentoring programs with activist components

Meet women where they are

*(Six Strategies That Encourage Women's Political Activism: Lessons from Interfaith Community Organizing, IWPR, 1995)*

These are attainable goals for the Bloomington community and Monroe County. Through various community groups, including city boards and commissions, we must seek ways to integrate these strategies into our work.

Additionally, research on women as political candidates suggests that they generally win elected office at rates similar to men, but far fewer women run for office (National Women's Political Caucus, 1994). In fact, per the Brown Policy Report, "Men are 71 percent more likely than women to run for office." It is critical that we ask why this is the case. According to Madeleine M. Kunin, in *Pearls, Politics & Power: How Women Can Win and Lead* (2008), some barriers to women running for office include "dirty politics; dealing with conflict and criticism; raising money; time; privacy; risk; confidence; and, 'It's not the right time in my life.'"

In order for the local community to address the need for more women to become politically engaged or to try and invoke any of the six strategies that could lead to more civic engagement, it is important to recognize these barriers. We must consider how to not only provide pathways or encouragement for women to become politically active, but we must also understand what the obstacles are and how we can remove them.

Finally, it is critical to also examine institutional resources, policies, and practices that might encourage women to run for office. Establishing an infrastructure that promotes women's civic participation—including policies or practices that would help them challenge incumbents—can be integral to increasing women's political voice (Burrell, 1994). Such policies include campaign finance reform, recruitment of female candidates by political parties, and fair and equal media treatment for male and female candidates.

## **CITY OF BLOOMINGTON COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

As noted above, women's institutional resources can play an important role in providing information about women's issues and attracting the attention of policymakers and the public to women's political concerns. They can also serve as an access point for women and women's groups to express their interests to public officials. Thus, such institutions can ensure that women's issues remain on the political agenda.

One such institutional resource, at the city level, is the City of Bloomington Commission on the Status of Women. The ordinance to create the Commission on the Status of Women was introduced by Charlotte Zietlow, City Council President, in December 1973. Mayor Frank McCloskey vetoed the ordinance on the grounds that it was redundant with the Human Rights Commission, but his veto was overruled and the ordinance was passed in February 1974. (Note the importance of having female elected representation in establishing this important institutional resource.) The first meeting was held on June 25, 1974, with 12 commissioners in attendance.

The City of Bloomington Commission on the Status of Women is a group of citizens appointed by the Mayor and Common Council of the City of Bloomington, chosen to represent the diversity of women's interests in the community. The Commission's responsibilities include exploring issues relevant to women and informing the community of these issues through news media, forums, workshops and educational materials. The Commission is dedicated to addressing the concerns, interests and needs of women in our community. The Commission explores women's issues, celebrates their accomplishments and works to promote solutions to the problems and challenges faced by women. The Commission's purpose is to assure that women and men have equal opportunity to function fully and optimally as citizens of Bloomington, as equal participants in the economy, in politics and government, in education, in social development, in the system of justice, and in all other facets of life. To these ends, the Commission identifies needs, resources, and gaps in resources for women; monitors federal, state, and local policies and their impact on women; stimulates and encourages legislation, issues publications, and does all it can to help improve opportunities for women in the community.

The goals of the Commission include:

1.

To identify the needs of, resources for, and services available for women in Bloomington;

To monitor federal, state and local policies for their impact on Bloomington women and to make recommendations to the Community and Family Resources Department for appropriate actions to assure women's equity;

To stimulate and encourage legislation for the development of social services of benefit to women in Bloomington and the State of Indiana;

To issue publications, materials, research findings and legislative information to educate the community about the goals of the Commission;

2.

To assure a coordinated City-wide effort to improve opportunities for Bloomington women;

To maintain close liaison with other women's commissions and advocacy groups throughout the state, and with other local, state or federal programs that relate to the needs, problems and opportunities of women;

To maintain close liaison with federal efforts in programs affecting women to ensure appropriate City participation, and to consolidate efforts at the local level.

As one of its primary objectives, the Commission is committed to providing opportunities for leadership development for women of all ages and backgrounds in the Bloomington and surrounding communities. In order to create ever-greater opportunities to cultivate the next generation of women leaders, the Commission has established two programs:

(1)

Women's Leadership Development Event. This event was started in March 2006 in an effort to provide women with the opportunity to learn from leaders within the community about their experiences as well as how to get more involved as leaders themselves.

(2)

Leadership Scholarship Initiative. This initiative was started in 2009 and awards scholarships to women in the general and university communities who are planning to attend a leadership development experience such as a conference, workshop, or seminar. Recipients are required to show how they will use such experience to put the leadership learning into practice in the community upon return. In addition, recipients are required to present about her experiences at the following Women's Leadership Development event.

Current Commissioners include:

2.

Cathi Crabtree, Chair  
Debra Vance, Co-Chair  
Janet Cheatham Bell  
Dorothy Granger  
Merridee LaMantia  
Ashley McDonald Kincaid  
Jillian Kinzie  
Nina Soo Onesti  
Toby Strout

Staff Liaison: Sue Owens, City of Bloomington Community and Family Resources Department

The Bloomington Commission on the Status of Women is open to partnering in work that promotes civic engagement of all women in the Bloomington community. We encourage your response to this data report as well as your ideas on furthering this important initiative.

## References

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Center for American Women and Politics ([www.cawp.rutgers.edu](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu))

National Women's Political Caucus ([www.nwpc.org](http://www.nwpc.org))

Institute for Women's Policy Research ([www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org))

Inter-Parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org))